

Suicide blast kills 51 near Al-Bab

Syrian rebels walk in the town of al-Bab



Al-Bab

An Islamic State group suicide bomber killed 51 people outside Syria's Al-Bab yesterday, in a major blow just hours after rebels seized the town from the jihadists.

In a statement distributed online, the group said its suicide bomber "drove his car bomb into the middle of a gathering of Turkish soldiers

and apostates working in Susian".

At least 51 people were killed in the blast, most of them civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The monitoring group said the car bomb had targeted twin command posts at a rebel base in Susian, about eight kilometres (five miles) from

Al-Bab.

Rebel field commander Abu Jaafar said that fighters, Turkish soldiers, and civilians had gathered at Susian for an overnight meeting "to organise a security apparatus and set a plan for rebuilding Al-Bab".

"This information reached the (IS) sleeper cells, which prepared a car bomb" that

detonated at Susian.

Abu Jaafar, who was near Susian at the time of the attack, said hospitals in the area were full of wounded.

Separately, two Turkish soldiers were killed in a suicide attack in Al-Bab yesterday as they were carrying out road checks, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said.

The strategic town, just 25

kilometres (15 miles) south of the Turkish border, was the jihadists' last stronghold in the northern Syrian province of Aleppo.

A source inside Al-Bab said stray cats were on the bombed-out streets yesterday, sniffing at the bodies of alleged IS fighters.

Doors of shops in the town's main marketplace had

been blown open by bomb blasts, and boxes of food and medicine were scattered on the ground.

A rebel scrawled the name of his battalion -- "Mutasem Brigades" -- on a wall.

In the town's south, rescuers and bulldozers were pulling bodies from the rubble, careful not to detonate any mines left behind by IS. -(AFP)

Turkish 'coup suspects' seek asylum in Greece: Police

Two Turkish soldiers wanted for their alleged role in the July coup plot have sought asylum in Greece saying their lives were in danger back home, said a police source said.

The two men made the request in the small border town of Orestiada near Turkey on Monday, the source said.

The source did not reveal their names but said the soldiers had been arrested.

On January 26, a Greek court rejected Turkey's request to extradite eight other Turkish soldiers who fled on July 16 a few hours after the failed coup.

It said the men's lives would be in danger back home. This has angered Ankara which has put out a fresh extradition request for the men.

The move has put a severe strain on diplomatic ties between the two neighbours.

UN 'disturbed' by light sentence for Israeli soldier

Geneva

An 18-month prison sentence for an Israeli soldier who shot dead a wounded Palestinian assailant is an "unacceptable" punishment for "an apparent extra-judicial killing", the UN said yesterday.

United Nations human rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani further charged the Jewish state with having "a chronic culture of impunity" regarding cases involving Israeli troops and Palestinians.

In March 2016, Israeli Private Elor Azaria was caught on video shooting Palestinian Fattah al-Sharif in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron.

The video showed Sharif, 21, lying wounded on the ground, shot along with another Palestinian after stabbing and wounding a soldier, according to the army.



Elor Azaria (R), who shot dead a wounded Palestinian assailant

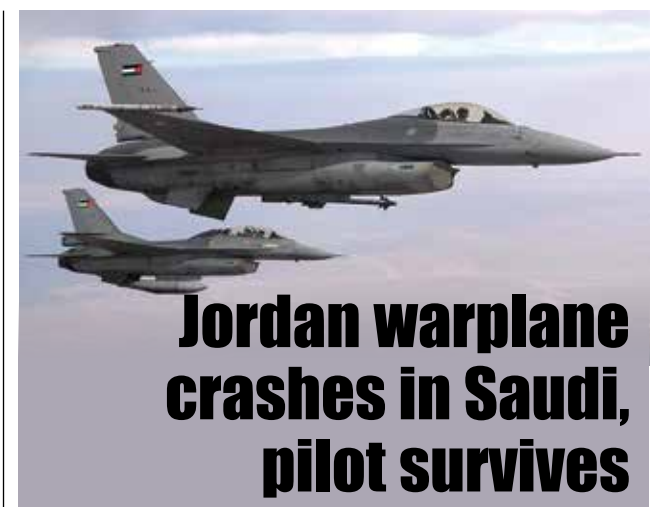
Azaria then shoots Sharif in the head without any apparent provocation.

After a months-long trial, Azaria was on Tuesday sentenced to 18 months in prison, with a further 18 months suspended.

"We are deeply disturbed

at the lenient sentence," Shamdasani said.

"While the prosecution and conviction are very welcome steps towards accountability, the punishment... is difficult to reconcile with the intentional killing of an unarmed and prone individual," she added.



Jordan warplane crashes in Saudi, pilot survives

Riyadh

AJordanian F-16 warplane crashed in Saudi Arabia yesterday but its pilot survived, the Saudi-led military coalition fighting rebels in Yemen said.

"Technical reasons" caused the crash of the US-built aircraft in the Najran district on the Saudi side of the border with Yemen, the coalition said.

It added that the pilot was in good condition.

Separately, the United Arab Emirates army command

announced the death of one of its soldiers fighting in Yemen as part of the coalition.

He was the second Emirati soldier in a week to die in Yemen, raising to around 80 the number of troops from the UAE killed in coalition operations against the rebels.

In March last year, two Emirati pilots were killed when their Mirage warplane crashed in Yemen because of what the coalition called a "technical fault".

Saudi king eyes investment, skills on rare Asian Tour



King Salman bin Abdulaziz

Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's King Salman begins today a three-week Asian tour likely to seek investment and technical expertise as the world's biggest oil exporter looks to diversify its economy.

Almost 50 years since the last trip by a Saudi monarch to Japan and Indonesia, Salman will visit those countries as well as Malaysia, China, and the Maldives.

"This visit will be the first time for 46 years, so symbolically it's very important," said Shigeto Kondo, a research fellow at The Institute of Energy Economics, Japan.

Salman's first stop will be close ally Malaysia, which the late king Abdullah visited 11 years ago.

But the Japan and Indonesia visits, where Salman is expected to seek further economic ties with the world's

third largest economy and the most populous Muslim nation respectively, are expected to be the highlights of the trip.

Tokyo and Riyadh have been discussing how Japan can contribute since Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman visited last year.

"So we can expect some sort of framework for cooperation being announced during (the) king's visit," Kondo said.

Japanese firms are already

helping to train young Saudis in technical skills vital for replacing millions of foreign workers in the kingdom.

Salman will be in Jakarta from Wednesday to Friday, followed by five days on the resort island of Bali, Indonesian media reported.

Saudi Arabia's cabinet on Monday approved preparation of a series of economic cooperation memoranda with the Asian countries.

These included a proposal for Saudi and Indonesia to work together on small and medium business development.

In Malaysia, Riyadh is looking for industrial, commercial and human resources cooperation, the cabinet said.

Saudi media reported that Salman will also stop in China -- the largest source of imports to the kingdom -- and the Maldives. -(AFP)